

# SEATTLE DOWNTOWN PARKS AND PUBLIC SPACES TASK FORCE

## TASK FORCE MEETING #6 SUMMARY: JUNE 17, 2005

### Task Force Members

Ken Bounds, Co-chair  
Kate Joncas, Co-chair  
Catherine Stanford, Co-chair  
Bruce Bentley (absent)  
B. J. Brooks  
David Brewster  
Tina Bueche  
Jordan Royer  
Ron Sher (absent)

### Parks & Rec/MID Staff

Christopher Williams  
Eric Friedli  
Stephanie Jones  
Rodney Nealer  
Cheryl Fraser  
Antoinette Daniel  
Dewey Potter  
Anita Woo  
Beth Somerfield

### Consultants

Bonnie Berk  
Michael Regnier

### **Welcome and Announcements**

Ken Bounds opened the meeting and welcomed attendees. Announcements:

- A focus group discussion on vending is scheduled for June 30.
- A meeting with a consultant on special events is being scheduled.
- No hearing date on Occidental Park has been announced.

### **Slide Show and Discussion of the 21 Downtown Parks**

Beth Somerfield presented her photos of the downtown parks. Task Force members shared information, observations and comments about each one:

#### ***Belltown P-Patch***

- The Friends of Belltown P-Patch group takes care of this park. Historic Seattle manages the cottages for Parks.
- The P-Patch is beautiful, active, and generally a success.
- There are problems at night and early in the morning
- Sleeping is a constant problem.
- The possibility of adding a fence with a lock has been raised.

#### ***City Hall Park***

- A planning process is underway for this park.
- During the bus tunnel construction years, the county paid for maintenance here.-
- Feeding programs occasionally come here.
- The building's back door doesn't open it up to the park.

#### ***Fortson Square***

- SDOT owns and maintains this space; it isn't a park.
- The City is speeding the development of the neighboring Campbell-Fuller Building for affordable housing and retail; no retail tenant has been found.
- Fortson Square faces the same challenges as City Hall Park and Prefontaine Park.

#### ***Freeway Park***

- This is the biggest park and green space downtown.

- New developments: Food service in the park will begin soon. Food, as well as games, tables and chairs, will be available for 3-4 hours around the lunch period each weekday. Also, the walking circuit through the park has been emphasized with signs and markings.
- The Park is used by nearby day care groups.

### ***Hing Hay Park***

- This is one of the most heavily-used parks.
- It includes a self-cleaning public toilet.
- The ID/Chinatown Community Center uses the park for classes.
- Tai chi classes are also held in the park.
- Use by local seniors is high.
- Problems: street alcoholics, night activity, pigeons.
- Tables would be helpful, but the pigeon problem prevents this at present.

### ***International Children's Park***

- This is the only downtown park with playground equipment
- Day care groups use the park regularly.

### ***Kobe Terrace***

- This is a very active park and P-Patch.
- Cider pressing, pig roasts and other events are successful here.
- The park can be hard to find; it needs better signage.
- At night there are alcohol, drug and homeless-related problems in the section of the park near the freeway. There has been discussion of adding a walking path in that area to discourage them.

### ***McGraw Triangle/Square***

- This area falls under a maintenance agreement with the nearby Westin Hotel, which deals with garbage there.
- Parks staff prune and take care of the plants here.
- MID Ambassadors deal with litter and homelessness issues here.
- This park has been part of discussions about a possible larger circle involving Westlake, which are waiting on news about plans for the street car.
- The park is always full of people who walk through or wait for buses or cabs; sleeping is the only major behavior problem.
- The park looks forlorn, though. Should add something colorful and/or a vendor, perhaps with support from the Westin.

### ***Myrtle Edwards Park***

- This property is partly owned by Parks, partly by the Port of Seattle.
- There is heavy traffic here, especially at lunch and from joggers.
- This the downtown park most used by women and children, because of its sense of safety.
- The Sculpture Park is coming as an extension to Myrtle Edwards.
- A crossover bridge is being built at Thomas St.
- The street car line may be extended nearby.
- The park seems bare. It needs more trees.
- But more trees may harm the park's openness and safety.

### ***Occidental Park***

- The planned physical changes for this park are hopefully coming in fall.
- Parks is working with the Pioneer Square Community Association this summer.

- The Pike Place “Funky Market” will be bringing a few stands here, as a test.
- Vending needs to draw local residents and make money, or the vendors won’t stay.
- Locals are the real market; Occidental events and vendors should be marketed to them.
- Does tourist traffic from the Underground Tour present an opportunity?

#### ***Pioneer Square Park***

- The remodel of this park was successful
- The fenced shrub display here is effective here.

#### ***Prefontaine Place***

- There are many challenges here.
- Prefontaine is being included in the review of City Hall Park.

#### ***Pier 62/63***

- This park is in the early part of a planning process.

#### ***Regrade Park***

- This park is an off-leash dog area.
- Volunteer projects help with maintenance.
- There have been a few vocal complaints, but not from local residents.
- A meeting has been scheduled between concerned citizens and the park’s stewards.

#### ***Tilikum Place***

- Parks owns only the fountain here, but maintains the whole space.
- The major challenge is parking by, and noise from, motorcycles.

#### ***Union Station Square***

- This space is owned entirely by SDOT.
- This space is very well used.
- It should be taken off the list of downtown parks.
- Perhaps Parks could work with SDOT to add color to this space, e.g. through fenced greenery.
- It already includes public art.

#### ***Victor Steinbrueck Park***

- This park is part of zone that attracts illegal activity. There are visibility problems in much of it. A children’s area here failed.
- SPD polices this park, making 2-6 arrests per week, but many individuals are simply shuffled back and forth between it and Western Avenue, another trouble spot.
- Parks is working with Friends of Victor Steinbrueck Park to develop a strategy and work plan for designing the park, but there will be resistance from the Historic District.

### **Washington Street Boat Landing**

- The only thing Parks owns here is the dock (that isn't there).
- The landing is owned by SDOT, and desperately needs fixing.
- Viaduct construction won't affect it, but ferry plans may.
- It deters people from visiting Pioneer Square.
- It needs more foot traffic.

### **Waterfront Park**

- This is part of the waterfront planning effort
- Parks is looking at the possibility of water access and a tide pool here.
- There are many places to hide and hang out here; taking out the benches was an improvement.
- There's nothing to do here, and no color. It has a sense of despair.
- It could be a good place to eat lunch, given all the to-go food available nearby.

### **Westlake Park**

- Park owns only the fountain here, but maintains the whole space. SDOT owns the remainder.
- Many possible improvements could help facilitate programming here, but all would be costly.
- The park is poorly designed. It's dark and there isn't sufficient seating or much to do.
- The tables and chairs, and the bus stop, have all helped.
- There is a pigeon problem, encouraged by feeding.
- New retail may expand the hours the park is used.
- The park is generally sticky and dirty, and there is no easy solution; given the resources, it could be steam cleaned every day.

### **Westlake Square**

- This is another SDOT-owned space, mainly used by passers-through.
- Transients live under the shelter, but it's difficult for police to write exclusions because the space lacks a street address.
- It seems very "endowable": a local business could honor someone by remodeling the space and endowing its maintenance.

## **Maintenance & Operations Update**

Christopher Williams summarized the Maintenance & Operations Subcommittee's interviews with parks staff in other cities regarding the major downtown parks there:

### **Portland**

- Retail arrangements allow the park to be an extension of food and other vendors.
- No clean restrooms are available. Most restrooms have been closed because of criminal activity and others are not desirable to use.

### **St. Louis**

- Public drinking is a major problem. Law enforcement is essentially absent.
- There is a clash of interests: historic homeless use vs. gentrification in the surrounding neighborhood.

## **Chicago**

- Chicago is a somewhat different case. The city has a Parks District with independent taxing authority, with both director and board appointed by the mayor.
- There is a significant security presence in Chicago parks, with up to 60 security staff in the parks daily.

Christopher then distributed the Subcommittee's ideas for potential guidelines for maintenance and operations. The potential guidelines fall into six areas, and Christopher and Task Force members discussed each:

### ***Safety and Security***

- Safety and security are closely related to maintenance.
- Key recommendations here include partnering with the MID for security, and posting codes of conduct.
- Posting rules is a good idea; police officers like to be able to point to a sign.

### ***Feeding Programs***

- Feeding programs are not compatible with parks, but are needed somewhere.
- City and city-endorsed programs are available, but are limited and not always in effective locations.
- There needs to be a conscious policy decision that is *enforced*.
- Dedicating one park to feeding may generate more net feeding activity compared to the total widespread feeding that occurs now.
- The "do no harm" principle should apply here: let's not make things worse.
- But what is harm?

### ***Park Uses and Size***

- It is not clear who are the intended users of each park.
- The downtown corridor should have one or two play areas, perhaps including one in Occidental Park.
- A playground was tried at Regrade Park, but failed; a population of users is needed first.
- The goal should be to provide the equivalent of a back yard to those who live downtown, and who may consider living there.
- Small pieces of park property should be converted to colorful landscaped amenities, not parks for people. There are many examples of this in Chicago: fenced-off green, with walkways around it.
- Candidates for this treatment include McGraw Triangle/Square, Fortson Square, Westlake Square, Prefontaine Place and Tilikum Place.

### ***Partnerships***

- Current partnerships have raised labor concerns.
- An Employee Involvement Committee should be established to identify partnership and volunteering opportunities that do not threaten jobs.
- One larger problem is that there exists no centralized forum to identify partnership opportunities.

### ***Quantity of Park Space Downtown***

- Parks should look to expand acreage downtown. One opportunity is the PC2 property just south of Victor Steinbrueck Park.
- Steinbrueck Park also could double in width if the Alaskan Way Viaduct is buried.
- Parks planning there need to be tied into the waterfront planning process.

### **Financial Resources**

- Parks need more funding.
- Possible sources include downtown Metro fares (if the ride-free zone were eliminated) or developer impact fees.
- The ride-free zone actually saves Metro money, so it is not a real funding opportunity.

### **Where We Go From Here: Three Meeting Look-Ahead**

Bonnie Berk solicited Task Force opinions on how to manage future meetings.

There was debate on whether the question of parks management should be discussed in earlier or later meetings. After discussion, the Task Force agreed to take it up near the end of its work—but to remember not be limited by current management configurations in its discussions along the way.

Task Force members commented that, because there is so much to discuss, there will be a need for longer meetings and/or longer dedicated discussion periods during meetings.

### **Task Force Roundtable**

Kate Joncas commented that downtown parks, in contrast to neighborhood parks, seem sad, unloved pieces of land. They have great unrealized potential. Also, the Task Force needs to look at human services issues.

David Brewster commented that good parks have specific personalities. In Vancouver, B.C., streets are given niches which are defined, then cultivated for ten years. The same method should be applied to parks. The Task Force should think about public perception: what will make people want to go to a park? The goal is a “renaissance for public parks.”

Ken commented that Parks and the Task Force need to think about the long term. Decide on a course of action, try it, stick to it, then change it if it isn't working.

Catherine Stanford commented that the Task Force's efforts come at a good time, with residential density coming to downtown and the mayor emphasizing his Center City Strategy.

Tina commented that she wonders about the difference between downtown parks and neighborhood parks, since downtown is in the process of becoming neighborhoods.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting will take place 8-10 a.m. on Friday, July 8, in the Boards & Commissions Conference Room on Level 2 at City Hall.